

Polyrhythms

Kevin Costante, 2021



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A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Fine Arts in Furniture Design in the Department of Furniture Design
of the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Rhode Island.

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Abstract

This work strives to integrate seemingly 'distant' practices into a concept by emphasizing their differences. A syncopation between a maker and designer, a planner and improviser. A search for commonalities in the middle of what otherwise creates conflict. I cultivate a space to play alongside my inherent formalities by incorporating color and movement. I find rhythm persists uninterrupted through the discrepancies of my process and inspirations. I want to see it in the outcomes of my work.

How can I be compatible with this world of rudiments and structure and also comply with my reliance on 'chance'?

Method of Improvisation

My process begins and ends in close contact with materials. My work emerges from being in a space with what I have to work with. It has a strong reliance on spontaneity and process. To an extent, my work is process. It concerns the immediacy of the moment. I place value in the commitment to actions without a set direction. There's great freedom and many frustrations tied to the process of improvisation because it relies on the unknown. Uncertainty and doubt begin the process of making a project and I'm learning to embrace it. Planning for me is a very rough idealization of steps I need to take to go forward. There is so much I can plan before I stop and let what's at hand guide my decisions.

As much as it irritates me, I go deep into the systematic practice of fabrication. Even though it causes me stress, I spend much time figuring out details and technicalities to achieve desirable results. It seems to be unnatural for me to emphasize so much on the technical side of making because I often times find it tedious and become irritated. I do also hold onto unconvincing judgments I wish to untangle; along the lines of 'what's technical isn't original or creative.' At times, I go all in and can't deny it's to the extent of seeking perfection!

Furniture making usually entails a lot of planning. It is probably because of the high cost of making mistakes, and because the structural methodology favors the fabrication of functional furniture. How can I be compatible with this world of rudiments and structure and also comply with my reliance on 'chance'? This has been a conflict for many years but has pushed me to ask questions. The articulation of what my process looks like has granted me space to work in the genre of furniture while still responding to my individual mannerisms. I have given up trying to separate my personality from my work, instead I'd like to think I'm integrating the two.

As I've become comfortable working with my hands, I've felt a shift to a more personal approach. My experience has granted me space to improvise with materials, wood specifically. I sense a return to the initial pull that lured me into the field; a connection to home, a sense of belonging through my practice.

I like to look at this part of my practice as a way to challenge the mind and tame my energies. It is a practice of patience and balance that keeps me grounded and logical amongst unruly behaviors. It is a sort of self-imposed challenge to check on my skills and senses. It is a confusion of creation; swaying from means of concept to that of process. The scrupulous aspect of making things keeps my disobedient self in check. It's a reflection of dualism that contains seemingly contradictory forces but may be complementary.

_____ GRAB IT..... _____-----CUT IT _____-----

MOVE IT-----LOOK----- _____ PLACE IT--

_____ GLUE IT----- _____---CUT.....

LOOK----- _____ MOVE _____-----

_____-----CLAMP.....-----THINK

-----SCREW IT _____-----CUT-----

_____-----LOOK-----MOVE

-----PLACE IT _____

LOOK-----THINK _____-----CUT

----- MOVE IT -----

CUT IT-----LOOK-----MOVE...

Solo pa'la Cruzao

Sanguero open

San millan Tranco

Caraballeda open

End

The page contains handwritten musical notation for guitar. It includes several staves with notes, rests, and fingerings. The pieces are: 'Solo pa'la Cruzao' (6/8), 'Sanguero open' (6/8), 'San millan Tranco' (6/8), and 'Caraballeda open' (3/4). The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and fingerings (e.g., 2, 3, 4, 5, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5).

My process translates to

The way I converse

How I keep the ball close to my feet

How I stride up and down stairs

A walk around town

Slow movements close to the ground

Tempo. call and response. my beat

My pace amongst another

A long stare at a piece of wood

The way I play the drum

Loops of engagement and disillusion

Dexterity. agility. anxiety

My inability to relax

The way I tune my instrument

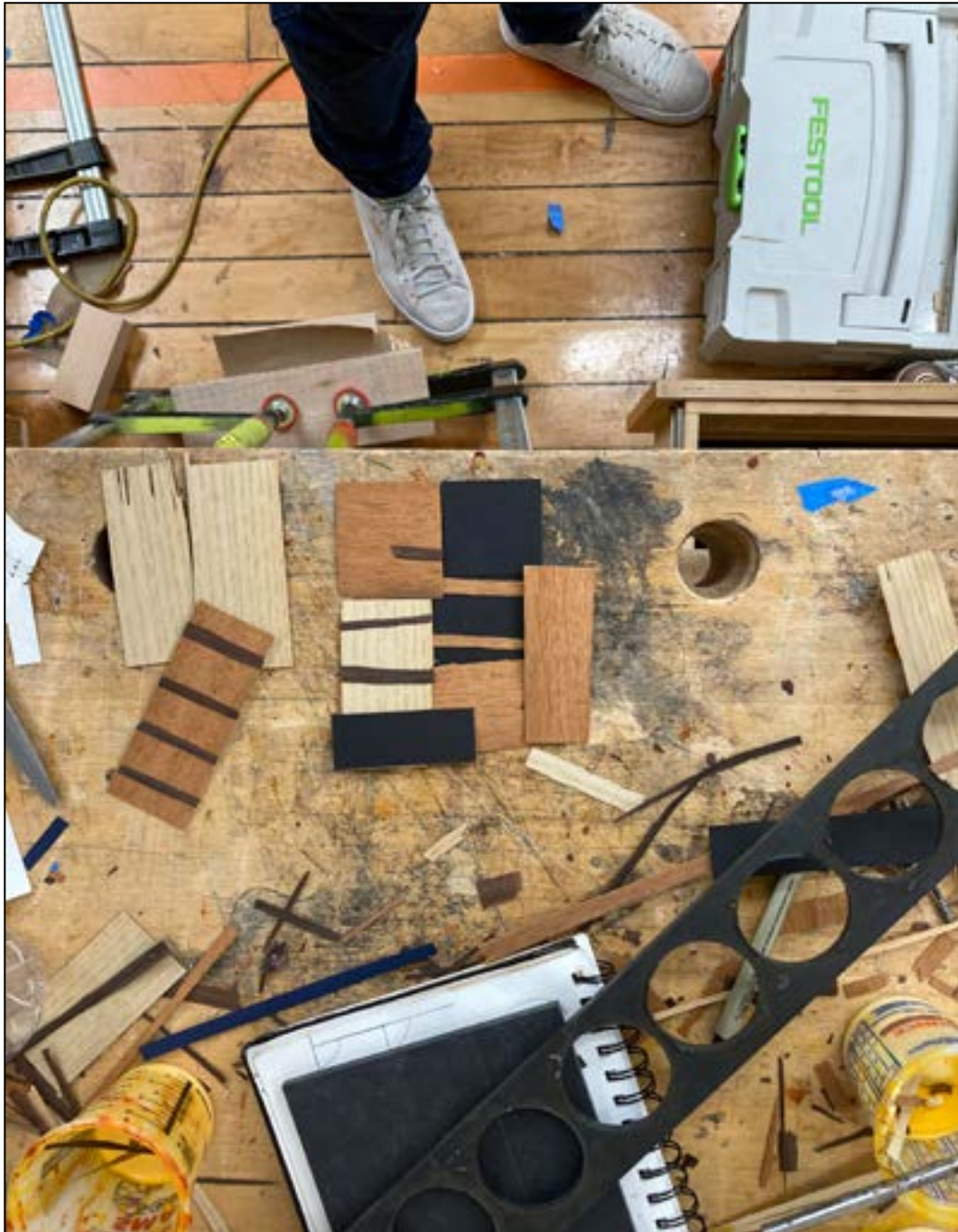
How I sketch on-top of sketch

Movement. rhythm. break



**sometimes I
have things
to say.**

**sometimes I
don't.**



Eye play

It was during my break from a semester, when I stopped journaling, that I remembered a habit of mine I can't recall when it started. I used to play with perception by altering my vision from eye to eye. Specifically, I noticed the way things 'move' when seen from one eye and then the other. I realized I did this to align edges from objects in the foreground to others in the background. It led me to explore the dynamics between lines, how they relate to each other according to the space in between them or the erasure of it. I sat with it and began connecting many of my mannerism and design choices to this one habit or 'play'. I decided to explore a language of lines and geometry I've always felt a pull towards that I never fully delved into. It clicked in so many ways!

I looked for connections to past work with a deeper insight of my tendency to work with lines and found plenty of them. I used to spray paint using tape as a means to get sharp lines, also, to block and reveal color layering. I designed my own project's brand and website around similar 'play' with line. I chose to accentuate furniture joinery with linear details in many of my pieces. This validates (for me) explorations with line because it ties directly to a 'hidden' personal habit that I can own without any doubt of its genuinity.



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It feels like a direct connection to my place of birth and influences.

By mere exposure, Cinetismo (Kinetic Art) and Geometric Abstraction are embedded in my DNA. Many public spaces in Caracas are beautified with murals and sculptures by the works of Carlos Cruz Diez, Jesus Soto, and Alejandro Otero. Their work enlivens memories connected to the place I regard as home number one. 'Cinetismo' is a Venezuelan language before an Art-form. A dialect that speaks color, movement and rhythm.

I've noticed what happens by the disruption of a lines continuity. The abrupt change become focal points, beginnings or ends. Things happen depending on what's next to the line and what takes its space. Steps entice movement. The boldness of the line accounts for what it transmits, as does its shape. The addition of color adds layers of tension that can be used for balance. One color can be dominant over another and at the same time be subdued by its counterpart. It becomes the observer's choice. I look to activate a shape or line by additions to its immediate surrounding. Compositions happen by the 'play' of placement, color, shape, size and other factors I have yet to discover. These are observations, nothing more!



Vuelvete madera

“Turn into wood”

I was told to turn myself into wood when I was unable to make it do what I wanted. My first teacher’s suggestion established in me a personal connection to the material I still embrace in my practice. It transformed the material into the teacher. Wood taught me to re-examine what I think I knew. These lessons permeate into me by direct contact with the material. This connection evolved into a familiar order, a space to fail and excel. A safe place to ask permission in-order to move forward or retract. Working with wood turned into a training of the mind and body that has pushed me to discover and develop ambition to learn.



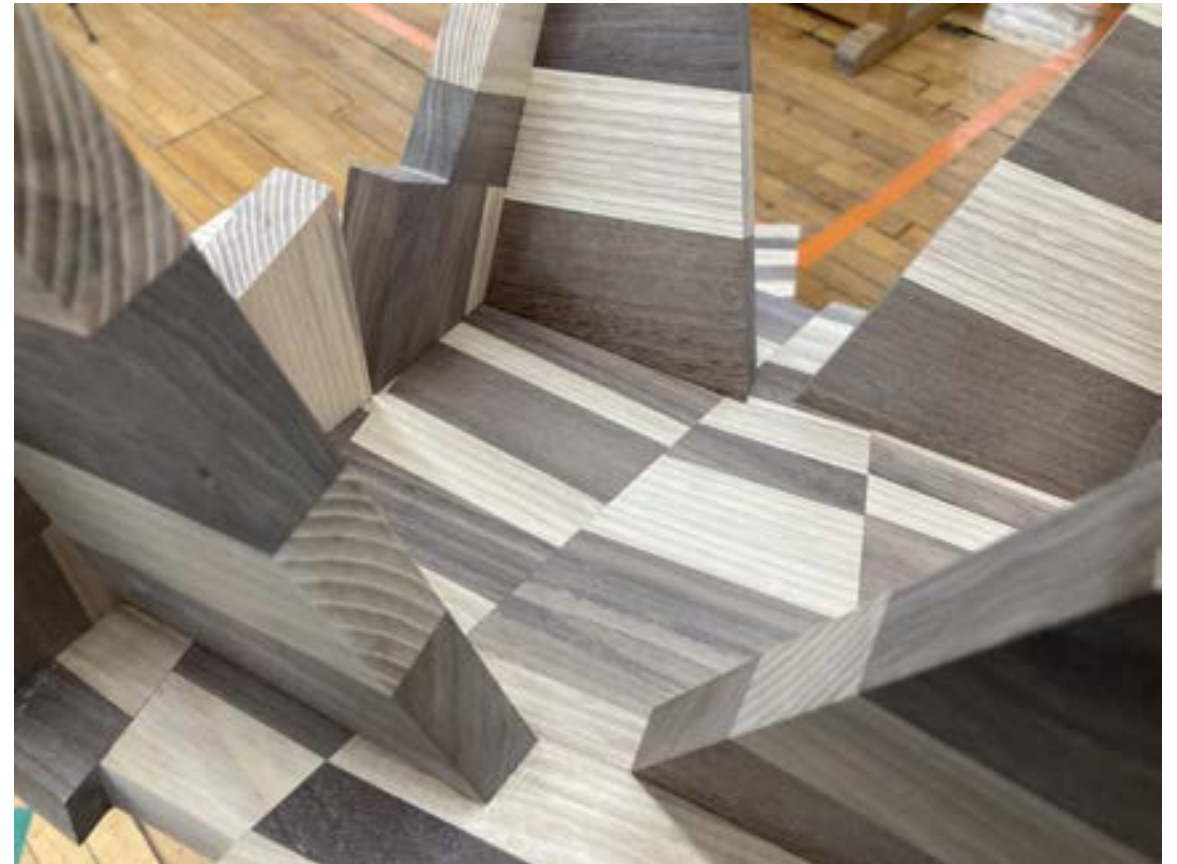
I was born amidst a complete renovation of the apartment I grew up in. Jokingly, my father associates the noise and racket of hammers and saws as the culprit of my future endeavors. Partly in response to my unexpected choice of becoming a laborer, he told me about a carpenter who was wonderfully skilled, one that built my bed, closet, desk, and most of the furniture that still stands. “I respect someone who can make something with their hands. I respect a carpenter.” I told this to my father when I first started working with wood and he smiled. I sensed and envisioned the powerful balance between mind body and spirit I could develop by becoming a craftsman. I saw what I could become when I was most naive.

I ventured into woodworking by making ‘Cuatro’, a four string Venezuelan guitar. The first time I stepped into a ‘real’ woodshop. I felt like a fish out of the water, in unknown territory of tools, machinery and many hazards. Wood pushed me into what felt was out of bounds. Against many odds, I gained experience and found myself making furniture and on occasion, a musical instrument.



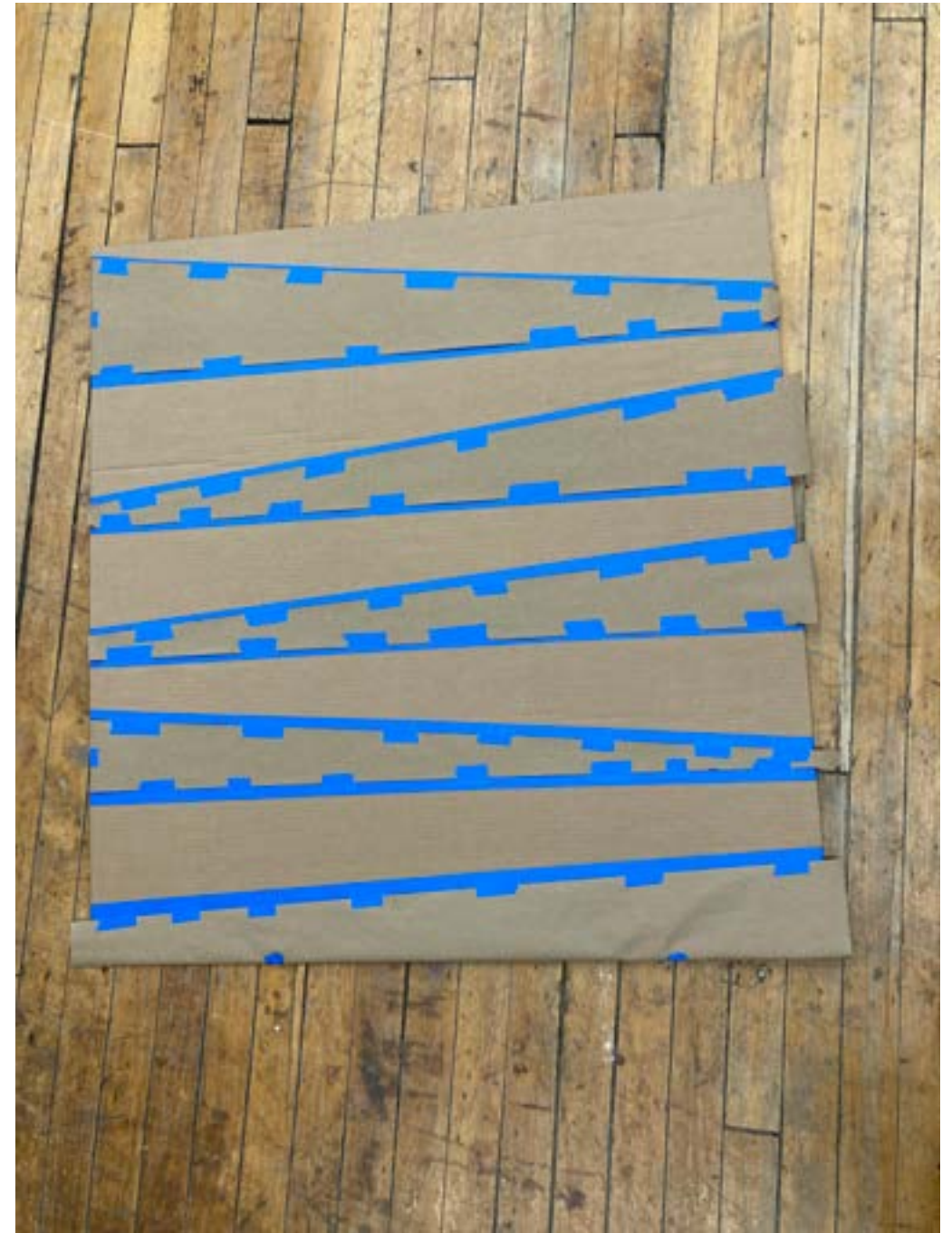


A coworker of mine in Brooklyn once told me: “After so many years, I look back at a finished piece of furniture I made and I can’t believe it.” With no other explanation, I understood right away what he meant. It’s like magic. It really is! One step proceeds another and then another; soon after something comes to life.



I glued long tapers from big enough scraps. Walnut and ash . Then I crosscut the boards into triangles and glued them back together into new orders. I thought of using the same technique to make larger pieces but decided to shift to veneer instead. Patterning with solid wood is not ideal due to the material (physical) movement. It is also a lot of work.

_____ GRAB IT..... _____ ----- CUT IT _____ -----
MOVE IT----- LOOK----- _____ PLACE IT--
_____ GLUE IT----- _____ --- CUT.....
LOOK----- _____ MOVE _____ -----
_____ ----- CLAMP..... ----- THINK
----- SCREW IT _____ ----- CUT-----
_____ ----- LOOK----- ----- MOVE
----- PLACE IT _____
LOOK----- THINK _____ ----- CUT
----- _____ MOVE IT -----
CUT IT----- LOOK----- ----- MOVE...



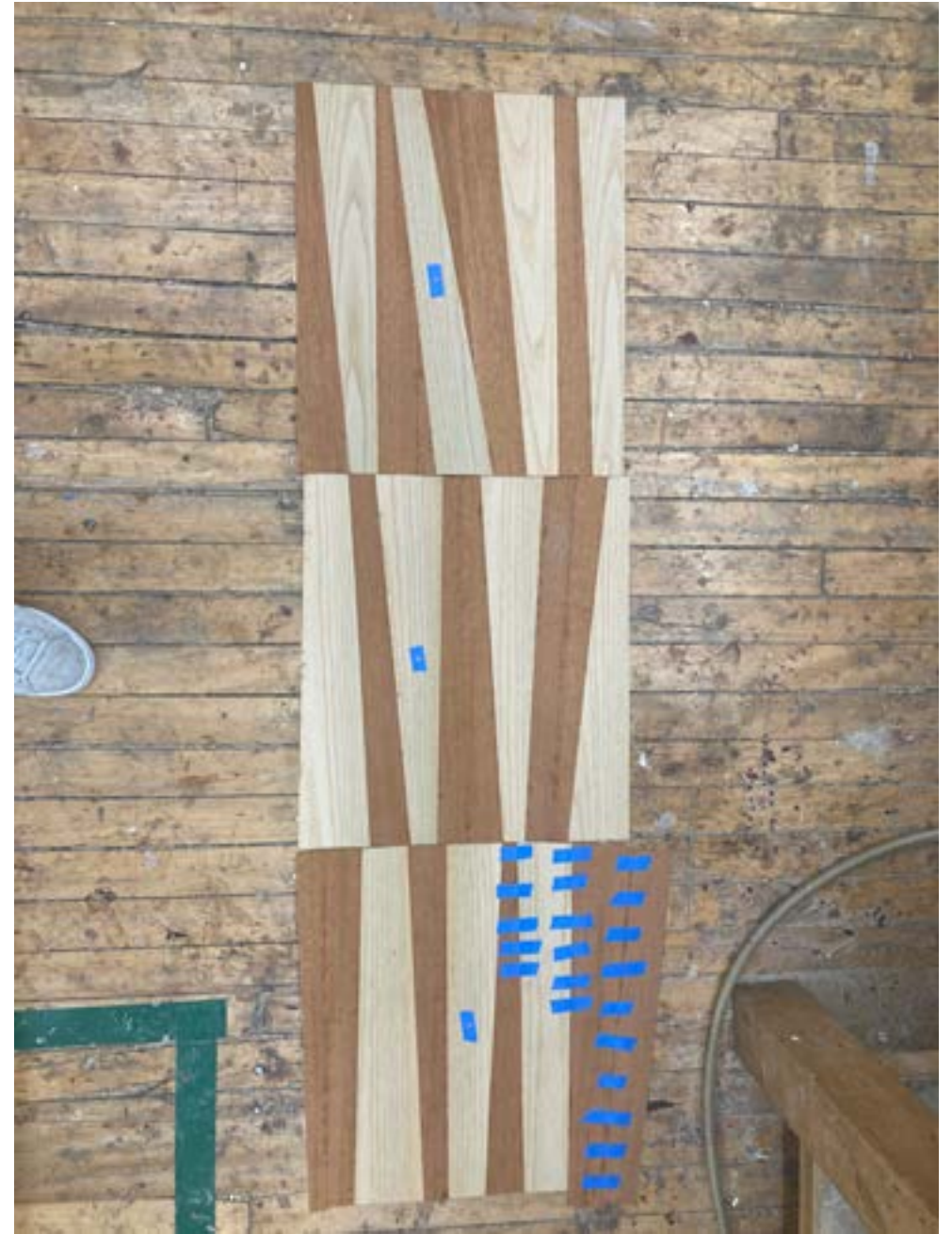
A fellow student said to me: “You can place the stripes anywhere in whatever order and they will work. You can’t go wrong.” I shared his perspective as I was working, but later realized it’s not true. It may appear that way at first but the composition as a whole resonates if the decisions of placement and scale are intentional.



**I make the
drum.**

I play it too.

The staves are cut and later glued. Hide stretched over the drum with hoops. Cumacos are made from felled trunks. Culo e' Puya's from lano wood. Laures from vera wood, so stong they won't crack no matter how hard you strike. I looked inside my drum and noticed how it +was carved. A man works the pith of the log until its hollow all the way through. He sits with it between his legs and carves it close to his gut. The drum is strapped to my back. I made clave's out of oak but they split. Skins soak overnight. Mine is spotted with the spine centered on the shell. I find it doesn't work if you don't think about it the day before. I use to have blisters, now I have burns form pulling the rope. When we finish playing I say: "Yes, I'll make you a drum." It has life before its played!

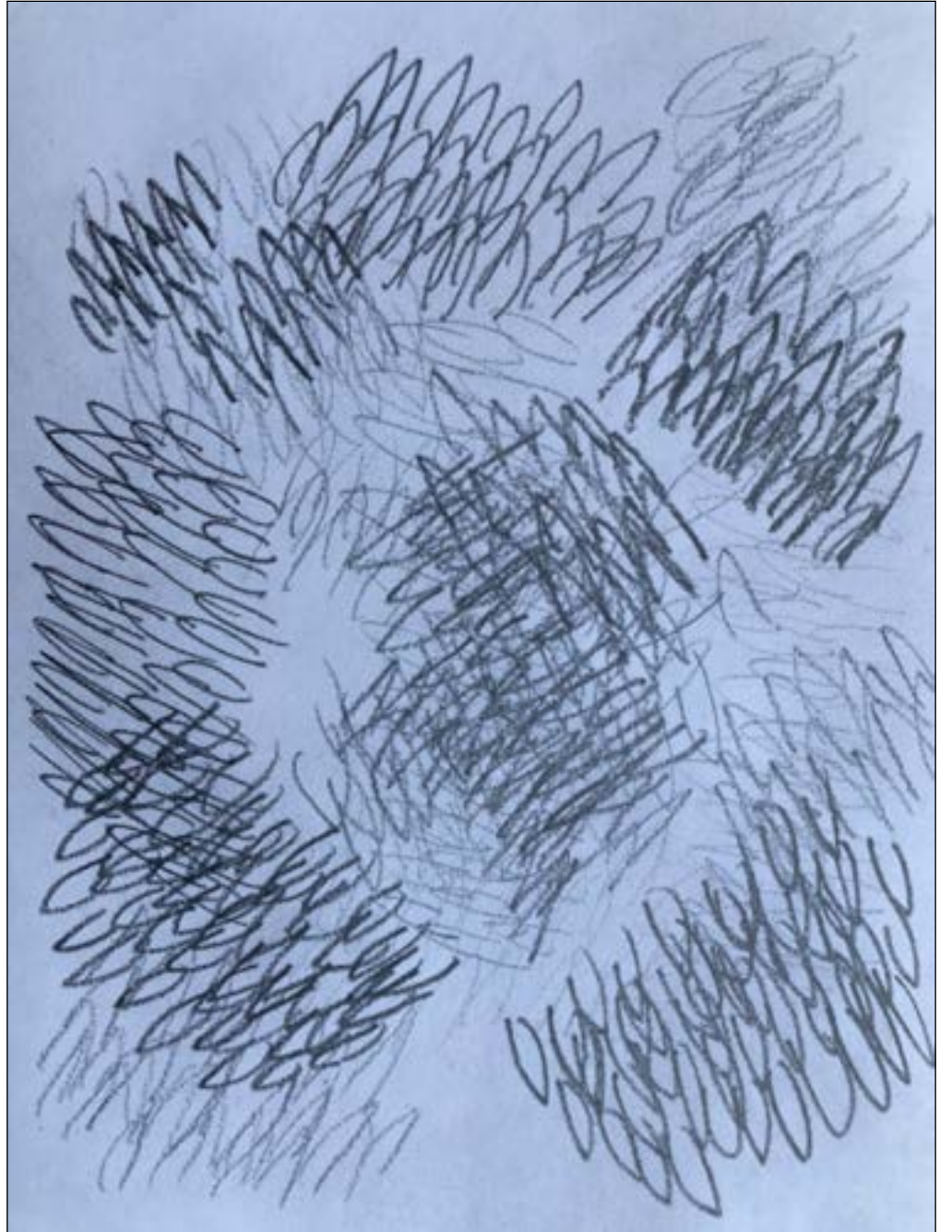


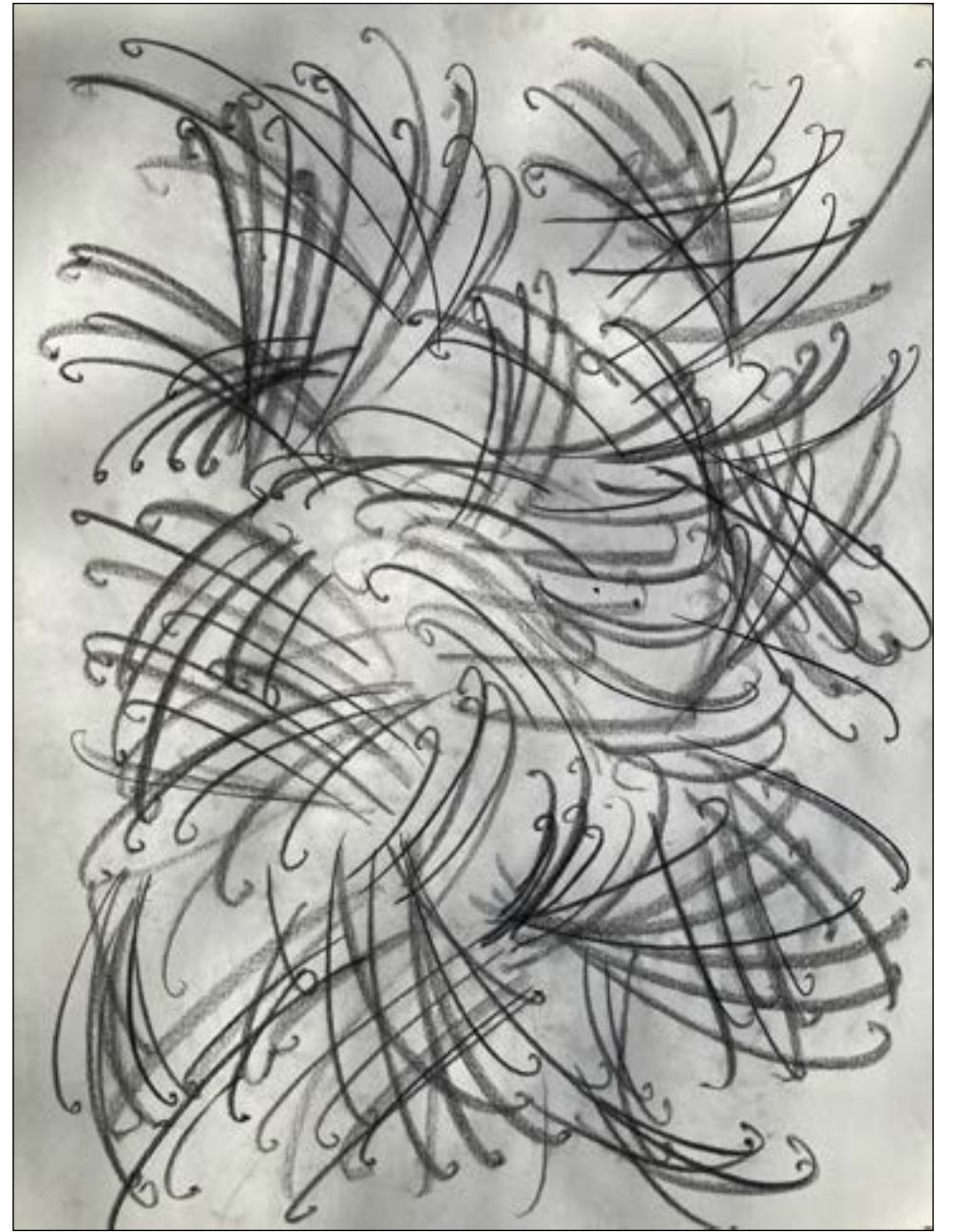
Drawing Motion

I repeated a mark over and over many times until I stopped.
I noticed my body's movement. Observed myself while I drew.
Straight, jagged, swoops and curves.











Sincopation

I made a cabinet inspired by the conga drum I had next to my bench. I used mahogany and ash veneer to resemble the colors of the drum. I cut the veneer into triangles similar to the tapers of the staves and rope patterns around hand drums. The movement of the sliding doors are visual crescendos. It celebrates the turns I took to strengthen my formation as a craftsman and recognizes what I left behind in the process. Color, movement, and rhythm!





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